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Chair

The Honourable John McKay

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Colleagues, it's 11 o'clock, and I see quorum.

[*Translation*]

Our first witness is Alan Rayes.

Mr. Rayes, welcome to the committee.

You have 10 minutes for your presentation. The members of the committee will then be able to ask you questions.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I am very proud to appear before you to present Motion M-124, which I had the opportunity and the privilege to introduce and debate in the House of Commons on November 9, 2017. It was put to a vote on January 29, 2018, and adopted unanimously on January 31, 2018. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the House of Commons, both those in the government and in the opposition parties, for supporting this motion.

Today, I am asking you to undertake a study to determine the feasibility of equipping emergency vehicles across Canada with automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and to ensure that the necessary measures be taken following discussions with the other levels of government, the municipalities and organizations concerned, with due regard for their respective jurisdictions.

Every year, there are some 40,000 sudden cardiac arrests. When such events take place, every second counts. For every minute that passes, a cardiac arrest victim's chances of survival decrease by 7 to 10%. In 85% of cases, cardiac arrest occurs outside hospital, usually in private residences, with no AED nearby.

That, unfortunately, was what happened to Michel Picard, a resident of Victoriaville in my constituency. On December 30, 2017, Mr. Picard collapsed at his home, in front of his family, without warning. He had suffered a life-threatening arrhythmia. Happily, emergency services were contacted immediately. During the six minutes it took emergency services to get there, Mr. Picard's son-in-law, Steve Houle, administered first aid in the form of external cardiac massage. This procedure increased the victim's chances of survival until the paramedics arrived with a defibrillator and administered three shocks. Fortunately, Mr. Picard regained consciousness and is today considered a miraculous survivor since he has no lasting effects from the incident. This outcome was made possible by the rapid response of paramedics.

In a cardiac arrest, external cardiac massage helps keep blood and oxygen circulating in the victim's body. However, a person cannot be resuscitated with cardiac massage alone; a defibrillator is essential to stop the arrhythmia and allow the heart to return to its normal state.

AEDs increase the chances of survival by 75%. That is why it is so important to have access to a defibrillator.

What would have happened to Mr. Picard if the first responders had been firefighters or police officers who do not have AEDs in their vehicles?

Regrettably, less than 5% of people who suffer a heart attack outside hospital survive. In an emergency, police officers or firefighters are often first on the scene, because of their proximity, even before paramedics. They are trained to administer first aid until paramedics arrive. If their vehicles were all equipped with AEDs, response time would be much shorter, and more lives would be saved.

In Quebec, some effort is being made in this area. The Sûreté du Québec has implemented a pilot project to put AEDs in all of its vehicles. There are also AEDs in some fire trucks and some public places. In fact, that saved the life of my friend Stéphane Campagna. While playing hockey with some friends in Victoriaville, he suffered a cardiac arrest in the arena. Fortunately, thanks to the contribution of some proactive business people, there was an AED in the arena. Thanks to that device and the cool-headedness of Marcel Duquette, Jean-François Gagné and Francis Garneau, Stéphane was resuscitated. The three men raced over to assist him and saved his life with the defibrillator, which was close at hand.

A number of police services have AEDs in their vehicles. Unfortunately, coverage is not uniform and comprehensive. Some areas still have not started making these life-saving devices available.

When I was mayor of Victoriaville, my team and I made sure, given what happened to my friend Stéphane, that every municipal building, sports facility and emergency response vehicle was equipped with a defibrillator. Furthermore, during the Souper du maire, a call went out to the people of the business community to ask them to purchase these devices themselves. In the two or three weeks that followed, more than a hundred businesses had gotten defibrillators.

● (1105)

The AED is an essential device for saving lives. Like most citizens, I want to know that my children, my family, my friends and all of our fellow citizens are safe, no matter where there are. I want to know that even if they are farther from a hospital, they are safe because emergency vehicles and public places are equipped with AEDs. All Canadians deserve the same chance, the same level of safety, no matter where they decide to live, in the city or in the country. Every person should have an equal chance of survival, and no one should be penalized for the location they chose to raise their family.

Someone suffers a heart attack every 12 minutes. It is a fact that the farther that person is from a hospital, the lower his or her chances of survival are. Why is that? Because the chances of survival are just about zero when a cardiac arrest victim gets to hospital; it is already too late. For the victim to have a better chance of survival, without aftereffects, an AED must be used as soon as possible.

As I stated previously, for every minute that passes, the chances of survival are 7% to 10% lower. We have no more than 10 minutes to save the victim, hence the urgent need to equip all emergency vehicles in Canada with defibrillators.

Fortunately, AEDs are easy to use. No training is needed to use one. Every AED has an on-board feature that describes each step in its operation, and the device decides on the strength of the shock to be administered. It is impossible to injure someone by mistake with a defibrillator, since only a person in cardiac arrest will receive a shock.

So, in my view, only one conclusion is possible: Having more AEDs available will save more lives every year. We can substantially increase the number of survivors by equipping emergency vehicles with AEDs.

The concern that many people have about equipping every emergency vehicle with an AED is, of course, the cost. But that small device is less expensive than you might think. On average, an AED costs between $1,000 and $2,000. That is a pittance in comparison with the value of the lives saved.

There is no doubt in my mind that AEDs are absolutely necessary to save the lives of our fellow citizens. AEDs clearly have a very important role to play in helping people survive a heart attack. They can save hundreds or even thousands of lives every year. That is a statistic we cannot ignore.

I am confident that with your study and the recommendations it will produce, the outcome will be positive. More Canadians will be able to live safely and with peace of mind; more first responders will be able to take concrete action in the event of a cardiac arrest; and of course, more lives will be saved every year. This is a concrete solution that can help increase people's chances of survival.

Consequently, I am asking you specifically to include not just RCMP vehicles but all emergency vehicles in the study.

I hope that we will be able to save lives by carrying out this study. That is my profound hope, and I offer you my full support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rayes.

The first question goes to Mr. Fragiskatos.

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Rayes, thank you for your work on this very important issue.

I will be asking my questions in English.

[*English*]

You mentioned that when you were mayor, a defibrillator saved the life of one of your friends in a public place, but many cardiac events happen in people's homes. Can you expand on the importance of ensuring that all emergency vehicles have a defibrillator?

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Excuse me, can you repeat the question, while I fix the device?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You mentioned that when you were mayor, a defibrillator saved the life of one of your friends in a public place, but many cardiac events happen in people's homes. Can you expand on the importance of ensuring that all emergency vehicles have a defibrillator?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Equipping all emergency vehicles with defibrillators is important, simply because, in many places, the paramedics aren't the first ones to arrive on the scene in situations of cardiac arrest. In my friend's case, there was a defibrillator in the arena. However, we can assume that police officers are often the first to arrive on the scene when people are located slightly further away from hospitals or from the paramedics' stations, for example, in the countryside.

If we made an effort to study how we could support all the safety agencies across Canada, we could save more lives. Furthermore, I even think that it would be timely to ask ourselves if we should include volunteer groups. Some communities call on volunteers to respond to emergencies. Take indigenous peoples and First Nations, for example. I didn't check, but I'm not sure that all of their vehicles are equipped with defibrillators. We could do something to that end.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think when many people hear about defibrillators and try to picture them, they think back to the 1990s or 2000s—whether they've seen them on news reports or television shows or whatever the case might be— and it's some big thing attached to a wall. They're now the size of a first aid kit. I'm looking at a Heart and Stroke Foundation pamphlet that shows a very basic picture of a defibrillator, yes, on a wall, but it's a decent size. It's manageable.

Is this the size of a defibrillator you're thinking could go into an emergency vehicle?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes. you can have that type of device, but, because the technology has advanced, there are now devices that are much smaller. Some are also portable. I even know someone who bought one for himself and keeps it in his car or in his house. Given the current competition in manufacturing the products, a device of that kind costs about $1,000. The device is not very big and it can be easily carried around by anyone who wants to buy one. It measures about 1 foot by 1 foot. It looks like the devices that usually hang on walls.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I apologize if you mentioned it in your presentation, but I wonder if you could touch on a comparison. What is the survival rate when a defibrillator is used, as opposed to when it's not? How critical is that difference?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: It is not complicated: without a defibrillator nearby, if you are not in a hospital, or somewhere with a defibrillator, such as a municipal or government building, your chances of survival are practically nil.

Even when there is a defibrillator in a building, the problem is knowing where it is. That is quite the challenge. When I was mayor, we had a situation just like that. After installing the defibrillators, we had to put signage in place to make sure that they were readily accessible. For example, if someone had a heart attack in the committee room we are now in, I am not even sure if I would know where to find a defibrillator so that I could respond quickly and come to the assistance of the person in distress. That is an additional challenge that we will also have to address.

In the motion I am tabling today, the priority is to equip all the vehicles we have. It is very simple: the chances of survival go down 10% per minute. You can look at the statistics to see the average time taken for an ambulance to get to the scene of an incident. I am not sure of the exact figure, but if the average is six minutes, it means that the person has a 40% chance of survival left. The longer it takes, the more permanent the consequences are likely to be.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It sounds like the difference is significant, even when taking hospital treatment into account.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, exactly. It is more than significant. It is a question of survival for a lot of people.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: My final question looks at the example that could be set here. What could happen if defibrillators are put in emergency vehicles, and how could private businesses or other institutions respond—or have responded—in examples that you might know about?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: For the most part, first responders are already trained. They are professionals, so would they need a little extra training? In my opinion, it could be quite quick.

I can tell you that, from my own personal experience, it is quite a simple exercise. We even established first responder training for people with a handicap or a challenge. A 10-year-old child can go through the drill; you just have to take the device, open it and put it on the patient's chest. The device gives you all the information you need and tells you what to do.

I invite you to ask someone to come to give you a demonstration. It would be a very good idea for an expert to come and show committee members how the device works. You would see that it is something quite simple.

Before anyone asks, I have calculated how much it would cost. According to my data, which perhaps are not the most up-to-date, it would cost $8 million at most to equip all emergency vehicles and finish the work started by a number of services across the country. When I look at the budget of the federal government, I do not consider that to be an astronomical expense.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you once more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rayes, thank you for introducing this motion. It is a pleasure to have you at our committee this morning.

We have a document prepared by the Library of Parliament that examines automated external defibrillators from a number of angles. I would like to give the motion proper consideration.

First, we see that the situation is not uniform all across Canada. According to the first part of the motion, the RCMP does not seem to be equipped with defibrillators, at least not in all its vehicles.

I would like to know if that corresponds to the information you have. Let's start with that question.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, exactly.

I would not say that the RCMP has not started the process. According to my data, some divisions in some areas, in British Columbia, for example, have already begun to equip their vehicles with defibrillators. The same goes for the Sûreté du Québec. I can also tell you that a number of municipal forces have begun the process.

I assume that, if everyone had not begun the process in 2018, it must have been for budgetary reasons. Today, I do not see why all emergency vehicles have not been equipped with defibrillators. This shows how important it is for your committee to conduct a little more exhaustive study of the situation, to do the necessary assessments, and then to submit its recommendations.

I must emphasize one thing in regard to this motion. I have separated it into two distinct stages, because I really wanted it to be passed. I feel that jurisdictions have to be respected, but, once the analysis is done, nothing is preventing the government from coming to an agreement with the provinces, the territories, the First Nations and the municipalities to determine the best way to provide the necessary financial resources, if that is the obstacle in the way of the project.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: At the moment, your intention really is that it be uniform in all the police forces in Canada, starting with the RCMP. Then, in full observance of the Constitution, each province should be able to comply with some form of federal guideline for all police vehicles in Canada, from the municipal level to the highest level, to be equipped with these defibrillators.

Is that your goal?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes. I even go further. I must point out that my motion is not simply about the police, but about all emergency vehicles. I feel that firefighters should be included. It might even be worthwhile to look at volunteer emergency vehicles. We know that some communities have an emergency system that relies on volunteers. If we do this exercise, we could increase manyfold the number of people who could provide first aid when unfortunate incidents occur.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Basically, part (b) of your motion is intended to establish the framework for the study you are asking the committee to undertake. We have some information at the moment, but we see that it is probably necessary to determine how far the concept of first responder goes. The legislation already has a definition of a first responder. However, from a federal point of view, your intention, as expressed in part (b) of the motion, is that, in our study, we should establish a framework and determine to which level the legislation should go. Is that what you mean?

● (1120)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Exactly.

Basically, it would not be right for me to make a motion that involves all other jurisdictions. So, for this motion, I focused on the RCMP. I have to tell you that Ralph Goodale, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, introduced a similar project in 2013. I used it as a model, but I did not want to limit myself to the RCMP.

I come from Quebec, as you know. In Quebec, we do not have RCMP officers, but we have other police forces. In my view, the exercise must be done for all Canadians. We represent all Canadians, in all parts of the country. It would not be right for me to have introduced a motion asking the committee to do work and come up with recommendations that left part of Canada's population unassisted.

I defer to you to recommend the best way for the government to go about starting the procedure as quickly as possible. I hope that it can be done in the next budget year.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would like to talk about the information that you currently have on the training.

As you said earlier, it seems relatively simple to use a defibrillator. Basically, are the police trained to use defibrillators quickly, either at police college or during additional training sessions? In your opinion, does training of that kind exist? if not, do you think that it is anything complicated?

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'm sure they have all taken first aid courses. Today, everyone in the police force must have basic training.

Some people may have fears. In fact, I had some myself when defibrillators were installed in our municipality. Some people are afraid to use the device, even if they are told that they just have to follow the instructions. It can be a disturbing situation for many people when something like that happens.

Having said that, I think basic training is given to police officers.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Has the risk of lawsuits been mentioned before?

Someone may want to save someone's life by using a defibrillator, but cause the opposite effect. For example, the person may think it is a cardiac arrest when it turns out to be another problem. The electrical pulse may cause a problem.

Are the potential lawsuits following the intervention of a first responder or a police officer one of the things to study?

Mr. Alain Rayes: That's a very good question. I think we should probably look into that.

I don't have a lot of experience in the area, but from what I've read on the subject, the defibrillator will not work if it is not a cardiac arrest. In other words, the defibrillator will not be activated if it is not a cardiac arrest.

I don't believe the stories we have heard in the past about people giving heart massages and, for various reasons, breaking the person's ribs or causing other damage.

That being said, I am not an expert on justice and I do not want to get into that too much. However, I believe that, in an emergency situation, we have an obligation to provide first aid as best we can. I repeat that, according to everything I have read about cardiac defibrillators, the machine does not work if there is no cardiac arrest.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dubé, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rayes, thank you for being here. Thank you for your initiative.

Your experience as mayor allows you to bring that sort of view or perspective to the legislative debate. In this case, it takes the form of a motion. I appreciate that very much.

I would like to come back to some of the points raised by Mr. Paul-Hus, in particular the issue of respecting jurisdictions.

Just like you, I come from Quebec. We are well aware that, despite good intentions and noble gestures, territorial disputes can sometimes be significant.

With that in mind, I was wondering what recommendation you were considering making so that the federal government, in good faith, would do what it could to take the matter to other levels, but without stepping on anyone's toes?

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'll be very honest with you: the forecast is that it would cost about $8 million to finalize the project to equip all emergency vehicles with defibrillators. So it's less than $1 million per province, if you do a quick calculation. That's an approximate figure. My training as a math teacher helps me get that figure fairly quickly.

Compared to other issues where the federal government has negotiated with all the provinces, I think it is a tiny amount. All it takes for this project to apply to the entire country and to all organizations is some political will.

Now that I am a federal member, I am trying to push the issue further. I did the exercise while I was at the municipal level: I asked myself what role I could play as mayor of the municipality. I have shown leadership. I could not impose this measure on companies or the Sûreté du Québec. I could only influence the firefighters and the volunteer safety organization in my municipality. I think it's largely a leadership issue. As I said before, I do not think money is blocking the project.

Now that I am a federal legislator like all of you here, my wish quite simply is that all Canadians across the country have the same chances of survival.

I expect that, as a result of your study, your committee will have gathered all the research, will have more tools than I had to do the first part of the work and will be able to make recommendations. I guess that is the sort of thing that could be relatively easy to impose in a budget. That being said, as you all know, my motion could not include items with a budgetary cost, since I am not a member of the government. However, I think it is something that could very well be done.

● (1125)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: There are other levels of government, but there are also other first responders. Recently, paramedics came to visit us on Parliament Hill. One of their demands was to better serve rural and remote areas.

Should the report produced as a result of the study from this motion include a recommendation for additional resources to ensure that there are more first responders? As I understand it, the police are often the first ones to arrive on the scene. Shouldn't additional resources be provided to improve the response times of paramedics or to improve services in other regions?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Absolutely. The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security could make other recommendations, but I would not want those recommendations to interfere with this project.

My brother is a firefighter with the City of Montreal, so I sort of know how it works. The City of Montreal firefighters are first responders. Their stations are much more dispersed across their territory. Often, they arrive first at the scene, until other people arrive who will be able to provide the services that the situation requires.

My only goal is to increase the number of people with defibrillators who can get to the scene quickly, be they police officers, firefighters or paramedics. They could also be volunteer responders or professional volunteers, as I like to call them. These people have basic training and want to give their time. If there was no defibrillator in a nearby building, at least the first responders on the scene would have one in their vehicle and could use it.

That is the main purpose of my motion. That said, I would never be against adding more resources to security services.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Paul-Hus has also raised the issue of training. Is training required to maintain those devices? Somewhat as you do before a plane takes off, should you do the maintenance or check that the equipment is working properly? You have more experience than I do in deploying municipal police to an event. Would additional training be required for this?

Mr. Alain Rayes: I think all professionals will ask for basic training.

As for the maintenance of those devices, we will have to rely on their technical features. I think you have to test them after a while, but I can't answer that with certainty. I am convinced that the companies that sell those devices provide details on the technical things to do to ensure that they work properly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: What is the average life of those devices?

Mr. Alain Rayes: I wouldn't be able to tell you, unfortunately.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Okay.

Mr. Alain Rayes: That would be a good question for someone in the field.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Yes.

Is there a cost associated with the maintenance of those devices? If so, I suppose it must be minimal.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In my opinion, if there is a cost, it must be extremely minimal. Professionals who own these devices could very well do tests after one, two or three years, depending on the features of the devices. It must be relatively easy to do. I am sure that the companies that manufacture those devices have included a system similar to that of a smoke detector, that is, if the battery is defective after a certain time, a signal is sent to change it. I haven't done a study on that, but I'm sure that, if you invite suppliers here, you'll find out fairly quickly. Today, there are more and more suppliers of those devices.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: No doubt.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Boissonnault is next.

Welcome to the committee, sir.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): I think it's Pam.

The Chair: Oh, this list and that list don't line up.

Okay, Ms. Damoff.

● (1130)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Randy. Welcome back to the committee. It's nice to have you here again.

Last summer I was having breakfast with my sister in a restaurant in Oakville when an elderly gentleman behind us had a heart attack. It had been 20 years since I'd taken CPR. The 911 dispatcher guided me through what to do, and then the paramedics arrived with the equipment that was needed. Afterwards, I had all of my Ottawa staff and my riding staff take the CPR course. This included training on the AED, which is extremely simple.

The problem is that I think most people do not have the confidence to use them. They see them on the wall, but not having done the training, they don't realize they won't work if you're not having a heart attack. You can't put the things in the wrong place. You just can't get it wrong. However, most people don't have that confidence.

I really commend you for bringing this forward. In my community, they're in community centres. Again, it's an issue of people not knowing that they can use them properly.

You mentioned that on the Hill, after Gord Brown had his heart attack, we checked with the security guards at the Valour Building, and they didn't know where the AEDs were or even if we have them, which is a real concern. We should at least know where they are.

In my riding, I'm in a medical building, and they don't know where the AEDs are.

One of the things Heart and Stroke recommended was having a national registry for publicly accessible AEDs. Do you see that as something we could possibly add to what we're studying?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, absolutely. You put your finger on a major problem. Once defibrillators are in place in buildings, the problem is really the signage. Once someone has seen something like that or has participated in a process to set up their surroundings with defibrillators, they are much more careful. From my personal experience, I can tell you that, when I walk around a public place like a shopping mall and I see one of those devices, I make a mental note of where it is located. Organizations that purchase them will have some work to do to inform people about where the devices are located.

In my motion, since I did not want to go all over the place, I really focused on the aspects that I thought were the most important. I wanted emergency service professionals to have those devices in their vehicles.

In this case, I don't think it's a problem, since those professionals would know how to use them. However, when you meet with experts—as I hope you will—if those issues are addressed, it may not be a bad idea to make other recommendations to push the issue even further. The idea is to make people realize that they are installing those devices thinking they are doing a good thing, but then they fail to work on raising awareness.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: One of the issues—and if you've come from municipal politics, you know this—is funding. The library provided us with a 2014 report that this committee did on the economics of policing. Municipalities pay 60% of policing in Canada, and it makes up to 50% of their budgets. When I was doing some research on police forces in North America that have these devices in their cars, it looks like a lot of them got them from donations or grants. Your colleague, Scott Reid, donated to a police service.

Is that what you're envisioning, that it would be grants that municipalities could apply to the federal government for in order to equip their police vehicles?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: That's a very good question. I don't know how it should be done. I leave it up to the committee to determine which model would be the best. If we come to the conclusion that it is a necessity, we will have to find the best way to proceed. For example, federal money could be transferred to other authorities, or it could be a group purchase through Public Services and Procurement Canada, which would purchase the defibrillators and distribute them. A remaining question is whether, so as to be fair to everyone, the government should consider compensating those who have already purchased those types of devices themselves.

I am thinking here of the question Mr. Dubé asked earlier about jurisdictions. I don't think the amount is large enough to create conflicts. No one is against motherhood and apple pie. I sincerely feel that, if a federal report highlighted this shortcoming and pointed out an inequity across the country, the rest would be relatively simple to manage later, during a budget year.

● (1135)

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: The same report indicated that only 15% of Canadians live in communities serviced by the RCMP. Obviously, only equipping RCMP vehicles would help, but it wouldn't reach as many communities as we would like.

Another stat I saw was that Ottawa equipped its vehicles, and the survival rate went from 6%, which is what it would be if you did nothing, to 12%. It doubled the survival rate of Ottawa citizens, because the police vehicles had the AEDs in them. It's certainly a worthwhile venture. By only equipping the RCMP we're not going to get to as many citizens as we would like. I know why you've done it, because we only have responsibility for the RCMP.

Did you do any analysis on how much it would cost to put them in RCMP vehicles? You mentioned $8 million for everyone. Did you look at just the RCMP?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, we did a little research with the people at the Library of Parliament. If I am not mistaken, based on the data we have, it would be about $5 million in the case of the RCMP. We estimated that it would cost about $8 million to equip all emergency vehicles with defibrillators. That being said, we should certainly look at this a little more thoroughly in order to update the data.

Let me reiterate that the first part of the motion is for the RCMP, for jurisdiction purposes, but I still believe that, if you decide to make recommendations, we should go further. I am thinking particularly of the First Nations. The government, and I think Parliament as a whole, is very sensitive to what is happening within First Nations. They often have independent police forces and want to have their own services. It would be helpful if you did the research. I did not, I have to admit, but I am deeply convinced that their areas could be better equipped with cardiac defibrillators.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just out of my own curiosity, before I call on Mr. Motz, if I want to find a restaurant, there's an app. If I want to find a bank, there's an app. Is there an app for this kind of defibrillator? Do you know?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: No, but my son works in computers, so I'll give him the idea of setting up such a project. He could get very rich.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll call your son as a witness.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Honestly, I think that's a great idea. That would be a very interesting option.

Let me use my municipality as an example, because it is very specific. After it was equipped with defibrillators, the communications department posted the information on its website, but people still need to think about checking the municipality's website to find out where they can find a defibrillator. It would be nice if there were a little free app. I am sure that creating such an app would not be very expensive. It could be a good sign of leadership on the part of the government to create such an app or to entrust this fine project to a young person.

That's a very good idea, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

It sounds like a project for a retiring politician who had the idea.

The Chair: Are you anticipating somebody retiring?

Mr. Glen Motz: No, not anytime soon.

Mr. Rayes, thank you so much for being here today. Thank you for your leadership not only in your own city, but here in presenting this motion for us.

From someone whose police service from my prior life had defibrillators, one of the last things I did from the executive branch of our police service was acquire more defibrillators, AEDs, for our police service. There are a lot of different ways to go about the process. We partnered with Alberta Health Services.

Mr. Dubé asked about paramedics. I'm not aware of any ambulance crew in this country that does not have an AED in their vehicle. This is something that they do; it's a life-saving piece of equipment.

We partnered with our Alberta Health Services people, which our EMS is under, and we acquired a significant number of those to put into our cars. We've already had them in our cars for years. They do save lives. We have saved dozens of those with our members responding as first responders. In our service, we responded as medical responders as a matter of practice. It's something that many police services across the country do. As you said, police can get there faster.

Fire services in some jurisdictions also have them, because they do medical first response as well. That does make a difference.

Mr. Dubé asked about maintenance. From our own experience, the supplier had a maintenance schedule. Our occupational health and safety people within each organization were responsible for ensuring that the series of AEDs received their maintenance.

On their lifespan, with anything, it depends on the care that's taken. They're in pretty durable cases. In a first responder's vehicle they are banged around a lot; they're not kept in the glove box in cars. They are in the trunk, generally. We have never had one damaged to the point that it could not be functional, so they are durable.

You're suggesting the RCMP, as Ms. Damoff asked, and you also suggested that maybe the indigenous police services have them as well.

Do you see that the costing of this could be shared between suppliers and other forms of government besides leaving it to the municipalities, that federal or provincial governments be responsible?

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yeah, that's right. A priori, if the federal government takes the initiative, it could take responsibility for the file and ensure that the entire territory is adequately equipped at the same time. This wouldn't be the first time the federal government has taken action that affects all of Canada, regardless of province or territory. This could even be part of the negotiations on health funds transferred to the provinces and territories. A provision could be included for an additional amount for this measure.

Keep in mind that, for the entire territory, the total cost of this measure is estimated at about $8 million. Generally speaking, this would represent $750,000 per province or territory, if they all had the same population. That is very little, compared to other amounts that are transferred. It would be relatively easy to do.

The more we talk about it, the more interesting I find the idea of including First Nations in the calculation. I don't think that was part of the $8 million I arrived at. Anyway, I don't think it would be much higher if First Nations were included.

[*English*]

Mr. Glen Motz: If I heard you correctly, the suggestion would be that potentially the federal government could take a leadership role in providing the encouragement to provinces and municipalities to do this. It could also provide a portion of a funding formula that could work, if I'm hearing you right, to equip vehicles. It could lead by demonstrating that those organizations for which it is responsible not only have the equipment but have the training to deal with it appropriately.

Is that a proper understanding of what you are suggesting, which could be a way forward?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, that would be very appropriate.

I repeat that I hope the federal government will take responsibility for this file. In my opinion, the amount of money is completely laughable compared to the magnitude of the benefits it could have on the population as a whole.

Will the government decide to negotiate for training to be taken over by professional organizations? This could be quite appropriate as well, since they already offer training. Given your experience, you could tell us more, but I think it would be very simple to then add half an hour or an hour to the emergency training offered to all stakeholders in all sectors.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

Ms. Dabrusin, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I was very pleased to support this motion when it was introduced in the House of Commons. I had the opportunity to talk a little bit about it in the House.

In my preparatory research, there was one thing I found interesting. The City of Toronto has conducted a study to find out where defibrillators should be placed so people can find them quickly. The study showed that if defibrillators were placed in a place well known to people, they would be easy to find. The example was given of Tim Hortons restaurants, but it could be other places as well. For example, if they were in Burger King restaurants, people would always know where to find one.

Someone said that the RCMP covers about 15% of the population; the rest of the population is in urban areas. Do you think it would be a good idea to recommend that there be defibrillators in other places more effective than police cars, so that people can find them quickly?

● (1145)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes. My motion ignores that because I limited myself to emergency vehicles. I didn't want to start interfering with other jurisdictions. That said, this measure could go very far. It could go as far as municipalities. It could even be applied through school boards across Canada. We should think about that. This has been a challenge for many sports facilities. Another challenge we faced was sitting down with the school board and the health care centre to make sure they were everywhere in the municipality.

The examples you're talking about are in the private sector. Could we raise awareness so that these organizations can equip themselves with devices? I don't believe that the government should pay instead of private companies in this case.

However, if the movement is well under way, perhaps it would be appropriate for the various chambers of commerce associations or federations, such as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, to conduct awareness campaigns. Ultimately, this could be a tax credit. It might be a good idea to offer a tax credit to any company that decides to purchase a defibrillator.

That being said, I want to say that this is not part of my motion. However, if you want to make a recommendation to go further, I would be happy to do so, and I would see no problem with that, provided, of course, that my motion is adopted first.

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The other part is the Heart and Stroke Foundation. It said that 80% of premature heart attacks are in fact preventable by a healthy lifestyle, which goes to the other side of the equation. You presented well as to why we would need AEDs when someone is having a heart attack, but in fact what we really should be doing is also focusing on the time before they get to that point. I found that to be a stark number, 80%. I'm always very interested in trying to get to the part about healthy living and healthy lifestyles, active living, so we can ensure that people don't need AEDs. While this is public safety and national security, if we make a recommendation to spend money on AEDs, should we also not be looking upstream as to how we can prevent this from being needed?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Your data is correct. It has been shown that 80% of heart problems could be prevented by smoking less, eating better, drinking less alcohol and, of course, exercising more. Prevention is the key to success in improving our quality of life, living longer and, above all, living better. That said, even a perfectly healthy person can go into cardiac arrest. That is why this motion was introduced.

Indeed, this should not in any way minimize the efforts and work to promote healthy lifestyles that all organizations do at all levels. I no longer know what the health budget is across Canada, but it must be well over 50% of the total budget. Emergencies are always being responded to, and perhaps not enough is being done in terms of prevention. You're absolutely right that it doesn't take away from our obligation to insist that there be prevention work.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Mr. Maguire, welcome to the committee.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate this motion coming forward. This is something I have been dealing with in my own constituency since I was an MLA in provincial politics. We've looked at a number of service clubs being involved in putting these into town halls, community arenas, and a number of other places. The price of these was somewhat higher at one time. You talked about technology. I'm assuming the cost will continue to come down for the development of these, as we move forward.

There are two specific areas you have talked about, one that I hadn't thought of as much. It was always a concern as to where these were located in public buildings. I also believe that they need to be in businesses, and that business needs to be involved in this. We have safety training courses and a number of those types of needs in business today by rules of operations, but the signage is very important. I'd like you to elaborate on that. How can that be fitted into the use and the cost of each one?

The education process is extremely important. It's a fail-safe type of an operation or piece of equipment, but I think the education goes to the questions Ms. Dabrusin was just asking about. We need to have a healthy lifestyle anyway. If we have that healthy lifestyle, maybe this will just put it off for five or 10 more years before you might need this AED anyway. If that's the case, so be it. It doesn't happen that way for everyone. I've seen a number of very—quote—"fit" people just fall over from heart attacks. That's been well logged in Canadian history over the last decades, and centuries, probably.

Can you elaborate on how other groups could be involved, whether they're service groups or chambers of commerce, as you said? Can you elaborate on the importance of the signage and education?

● (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: First, I will talk about business people. Everyone is aware of the labour shortage across Canada. If I owned a business, I would want to take care of my staff. Many companies offer favourable conditions to do more sports, give credits to employees who become members of a fitness centre, or install showers and training centres on site. Not all companies do this, but those with the means do.

I love the idea that has been put forward of offering tax credits to companies that buy defibrillators, which would increase the number of defibrillators.

I seem to be hammering away and repeating myself, but that has nothing to do with my motion. I wanted to focus on emergency vehicles across Canada. However, if the expert testimony leads you to make other recommendations that will increase the number of these devices and increase the federal government's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, I am certainly not the one who will oppose them. On the contrary, I would be very happy. However, I would like us to focus on one thing. I would not want the report to be overburdened and the essential thing forgotten, which is to equip all emergency vehicles across Canada with defibrillators.

I'm not an expert in health or science, but I know that even if a person is very fit, they can go into cardiac arrest. We see that most cardiac arrests occur in sports venues. We all exercise to get fit, but unfortunately we can get injured. For various reasons, people go into cardiac arrest with intense effort. It's a big issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's very accurate. I know of people who have been working out at the YMCA, for example, who have almost died of a heart attack right in the Y, and this type of equipment saved their lives because it was there. That's one area.

There may be a comparison. I don't know if you can draw a comparison. Maybe a second part of the motion would be to study how AEDs are used in other parts of the world. Have you had any recommendations on that?

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: That is a very wise comment. I haven't checked whether governments elsewhere in the world have taken the initiative to do that. I invite you to ask that we do some research on this subject. It was about whether we are lagging behind other countries or whether we will become leaders in the field.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: That was my point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Maguire.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, Mr. Boissonnault.

● (1155)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You get the last intervention.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you; that's kind.

Mr. Rayes, I would like to thank you for your presentation.

About 20 years ago, I received a phone call from the hospital in St. Albert. That was in 1997. I was told that my sister was in hospital there and that I had to go. When I arrived, I found my whole family outside the hospital. My sister, who was 20 years old at the time, died suddenly that morning, while she was in perfect health. We didn't know why she died. It was later determined that her heart had stopped. She was at work, on the telephone, and she fell out of her chair. She died in less than 20 minutes. We are now convinced that a defibrillator would have saved my little sister's life. There was also the death of my father, six years ago, who died of a heart attack. So my family is the perfect example of cases where the chances of survival are practically nil without a defibrillator. I fully support you and the committee's efforts.

It is interesting to note that in Morinville, where I grew up, we were essentially covered by the RCMP. In my riding of Edmonton-Centre, where I now live, that is the responsibility of the Edmonton Police Service. So I've known both police systems.

I would like to know if you think your motion is sufficient to provide authorities other than the federal government and the RCMP with the necessary leadership or the moral support to encourage cities and municipalities to act on what you are proposing in your motion.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, that's right. I'm convinced that a report from the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security that would be support by all parliamentarians, and therefore by the government, of course, could get things moving quickly. I'm convinced that, if things were conducted smoothly, this could be resolved before the end of the mandate. There is still one budget year left. In other words, we should try to get there as quickly as possible.

I still believe that, in our budget year, these amounts are a trifle. I am convinced that if we brought people around the table who would even be a little bit wild, it would be quite possible to find these sums within a budgetary framework. At least, we could negotiate or discuss with the premiers or representatives of the provinces, territories and First Nations. We could send a very clear message. I'm also thinking, considering all the comments you have made, that it would be possible, at the same time, to encourage the economic community as a whole, as well as educational and health institutions, to equip themselves with these devices. That would create movement.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: With respect to the public service and Public Service and Procurement Canada, is there a policy that all federal buildings must be equipped with defibrillators? I don't know the answer to that question. What I mean is, I'm not acting like a lawyer by asking a question that I already know the answer to. If such a policy exists, where are we in this regard?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to answer your question about buildings. But I can tell you that, if all federal buildings are equipped with defibrillators, I haven't seen many in my two and a half years since becoming a member of Parliament. I seriously wonder where I would find a defibrillator if an employee in my office or an adjacent one had a heart attack. I would dial 911.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I wouldn't even know where to go in the Confederation Building. In fact, I don't know if there is one there.

I did an Ironman triathlon in memory of my sister. I think the work we're doing today is important. It's in memory of my sister and father. Thank you very much.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I have also done Ironman triathlons.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Well, there you go!

Mr. Alain Rayes: I'll be doing my third Ironman this August.

This project is very important to me.

Our time is running out. I just want to thank you personally for your questions and your attention to this motion. I want to thank all parliamentarians from all the political parties for their support.

You can't imagine how proud I felt that day to be a Canadian MP and to see that, although there is partisanship on many issues, as we know, we are all able to stand up when it's for the well-being of all Canadians.

I want to thank you all for what you've done.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's a good note on which to end our time with you, Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your presentation. It was very interesting.

Thank you, too, to committee members for their participation. It was also very rewarding.

[*English*]

We're going to suspend for a few minutes.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (1200)

The Chair: We can resume.

Our next presenter is Ms. Shannon Stubbs, the MP for Lakeland. She is presenting on Motion M-167 regarding rural crime in Canada.

Ms. Stubbs, welcome to the committee. You have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of you for asking me to be a witness at this committee as you undertake the assessment called for by Motion M-167. I am very grateful that the House of Commons passed that motion unanimously on May 30.

In probably what may be a rare moment for me, regardless of the length of time that Lakeland keeps sending me back here to represent them, I do want to thank explicitly the Liberals for offering their support for Motion No. 167 so that we could get here today. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the action against rural crime that my and all our of our constituents deserve. Rural members of Parliament have been active in advocating on this urgent issue, for example, the work of the Alberta rural crime task force, and joint town halls in Saskatchewan between MPs, provincial and municipal representatives, RCMP members, and concerned residents.

Between its introduction and the second hour of debate, Motion M-167 received 101 endorsements from local crime watch groups and from a wide cross-section of provincial MLAs, municipalities, and major municipal associations in seven provinces, including the Alberta Provincial Rural Crime Watch Association with 17,000 members, Farmers Against Rural Crime with 16,000 members, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. Hundreds more Canadians contacted me in support, and dozens shared their personal experiences.

I want to recognize the NDP for their support of Motion M-167 right at the outset. I accepted an amendment that added measures to increase the effectiveness of indigenous police forces, resources for rural judicial and rehabilitation systems, and improved support for victims of rural crime. It undoubtedly strengthened the motion from its original version.

I don't want to be prescriptive to this committee on how you undertake this analysis, but I want to mention MP Georgina Jolibois, the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, as a potential witness or as someone whose input may be sought during your work. She is from northern Saskatchewan, spent nine years on the RCMP "F" division's aboriginal advisory committee, and is the former mayor of La Loche. She may offer unique insight, and we share common views on consistent approaches to protect law-abiding Canadians, regardless of community or region.

I want to tell you why I put this motion forward.

After the 2015 election, the main concern in Lakeland was the loss of oil and gas jobs in Alberta; however, it rapidly became rural crime, which I heard about repeatedly from residents and business owners when I was knocking on doors last summer in towns and visiting farm families across Lakeland, which is about 32,000 square kilometres. Many have been victims of multiple break-ins and robberies, with varying degrees of violence. Many say that they know more people who have been broken into than who haven't, and others believe that it is inevitable. The reality is that they feel unsafe in their homes, and they are concerned about a lack of visible police presence. Most say that they have never faced anything like this before. It is seriously impacting business retention and personal and business insurance renewals because of the high likelihood of property being damaged and stolen throughout those communities. To be sure, my constituents' experiences are reflected in statistics.

Rural crime is a growing problem across Canada. Statistics Canada reports that Canada's crime index rose for the first time in 12 years in 2015. The highest increase was in western Canada, led by a 10% spike in rural Alberta. In 2016, the index increased for a second year in a row, with several thousand more police-reported incidents. Currently, there are claims that numbers are declining slightly, but there is also a reasonable consensus that the stats are being skewed because so many rural Canadians are giving up and have stopped reporting.

In 2015, the bump in the national non-violent crime severity index, CSI, was partly the result of significantly increasing property crime, most notably in Alberta. In 2016, the CSI increased 2% over 2015 nationally. Alberta's uptick was primarily due to more breaking and entering, thefts of $5,000 or under, and motor vehicle theft. Just to put this in perspective for you, a recent RCMP report found that property crime in rural Alberta alone has risen by 41% in the last five years, while the population has only grown by 8%. Those kinds of crimes also significantly contributed to push up CSI rates in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories.

I know that many of you on this committee represent ridings in the greater Toronto area, which is highly populated, so I want to give some rural perspective, both anecdotal and based on the facts.

● (1205)

Most rural areas across Canada are policed by the RCMP, except in Quebec and Ontario, which have provincial police forces. The RCMP provides specific federal policing services in those provinces as it does in the rest of the country. Many larger cities and districts have their own municipal police forces, but more than 150 municipalities, three international airports, and 600 indigenous communities have contracts with the RCMP for their local services, which is why my motion touched on the multiple jurisdictions involved.

In rural Canada, the RCMP has a lot of ground to cover. They have very limited resources and understaffed detachments, and there are unique factors like challenging road conditions with no street lights over great distances, and inconsistent or non-existent Wi-Fi and cell coverage. That all impacts response times.

Rural Canadians are creating buddy systems between farm families. There are neighbourhood watches and citizens on patrol to help protect each other because of long response times. One of my constituents, Bob, told me that his community had to start a WhatsApp group in their area where members alert other members of suspicious vehicles and events so that they can respond to help each other since there is effectively no RCMP response.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Excuse me, but could you read more slowly?

● (1210)

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I'm sorry. I think interpreters have this challenge with me.

Thanks, Pierre.

Candace, who is also from Lakeland, told me that they operate a substantial farm which is their livelihood. Their shop was broken in to. The tractor trailer cab interiors were messed up. Registrations, glasses, meds, paper files, etc., we taken. There were excellent footprints, but the RCMP showed up a week later.

Just so you know, that family farm has been broken into more than once in the past two years, and one of their sons down the road had his truck stolen out of his yard by three criminals while his kids were outside playing. The reality for that family is that if anything had happened, the RCMP that would be dispatched to help them were 60 kilometres away.

RCMP members themselves have been speaking out, which is difficult and a challenge for them, but they say they are concerned about their own safety and the safety of the communities that they serve and protect across Canada. In Lakeland, one detachment has only four RCMP members covering 2,200 square kilometres and 8,500 Albertans. The reality is that there are rarely two officers on duty at once because of a lack of administrative staff. One may be out on the ground, and one is usually back at the office doing administrative duties.

There have been recent stand-alone announcements and budget commitments this spring from the Alberta and Saskatchewan provincial governments for targeted rural crime reduction teams, more resources for prosecutors and courts, and other collaborative law enforcement initiatives. In January, the federal government announced $291 million for policing in first nations and Inuit communities in Canada over the next five years. These are a start, and your committee's assessment will be a timely opportunity to review and measure outcomes, successes, gaps, and future needs related to these various initiatives.

While rural crime is most acute in western Canada, eastern provinces face high rural crime rates too. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the town council of Indian Bay supported a motion unanimously, saying that their area has seen more and more crime in the past months. In the past two weeks alone there were six home break-ins, which is unheard of in their area, and very concerning. They say it's becoming an increasing issue in Newfoundland and Labrador, much like the rest of Canada. They're doing their best to support their community, neighbours, and neighbouring communities, but there are limits to their resources and authority. Those comments were echoed by an endorsement from the Town of Kensington in Prince Edward Island.

From B.C. to P.E.I. and the north, rural crime is a major challenge, with many factors including gangs and the opioid crisis harming families, businesses, and communities.

My constituents and other rural Canadians often tell me that they feel like sitting ducks and that they originally moved to a rural area in order to feel safe because it's safer than urban areas. Most officers are doing the best they can with what they have, but there is a widespread frustration and feeling of vulnerability. For comparison, if you live in downtown Toronto, the closest police force to you would be located in Markham, and if you live in Montreal, the closest police detachment would be located in Terrebonne. That means that if you or your family were in danger, the police response time would be at minimum 40 minutes.

In summary, that is exactly what my constituents and residents all across rural Canada are facing. That's why I'm pleased that the committee will undertake this formalized, in-depth assessment of this urgent issue on behalf of all rural Canadians. I look forward to the recommendations that will result from your committee study.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Stubbs.

Ms. Damoff, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank you very much for bringing this motion forward. I have family in Alberta, and in January of this year, I was out visiting on a farm in Camrose. At the farm the previous year—the owners are not there all the time—someone drove a car onto the property and set it on fire. Luckily, neighbours called, and they were able to put the fire out before the fire actually reached the home. They've had to spend money on security, as well as on a gate at the end of the driveway. They're on a very quiet road, and the night I was there, a car was driving up and down the road. My cousin's partner's brother followed the car, and came at 3:00 in the morning to check and make sure that we were okay. He was given a very hard time about following a car on his own on a quiet rural street.

So, while I represent a GTA riding, I certainly have a lot of respect and appreciation for your bringing this motion forward because I have seen first-hand the impact that it has on families. Thank you for that.

The minister held a guns and gangs summit in March, and some of the testimony there was about how new drug markets have been driving the gangs out of urban centres and into rural and indigenous communities. In a CBC article I was reading, one of the people who spoke there, Kathleen Buddle, talked about some of the modern aspects of gangs, which include human trafficking.

Certainly, as vice-chair of the status of women committee, human trafficking is an issue that's of great concern to me. I'm just wondering if you would be okay with, while we're looking at rural crime, including that aspect in what we're studying.

● (1215)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I wouldn't want to be prescriptive to your work as you undertake it as committee members; however, to your point about increased gang activities in rural communities, I've certainly heard from members of law enforcement, as well as from an MLA in Alberta who was formerly a member of the city police, that increased organized crime operations in rural communities is happening. It's in part because they know there is a lack of police presence out there. I certainly would have no problem with that factor also being included in this analysis.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think I read the stat—and you probably have better information than I do—that one in 10 RCMP officer positions are vacant because it's hard to get people into rural and remote communities. You're nodding your head, so I think that stat is probably, if not right, close to right.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, I think it is. I'll just tell you that I have been in some round tables with some RCMP members who have said that they're making efforts as of this year to try to increase recruitment and those numbers, but that is certainly the latest stat I have and that was public.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's pretty significant. You mentioned response times. Certainly, if all of those positions were filled, it would be a step in the right direction toward getting those response times down. Have you heard anything from your discussions or round tables about how the RCMP can go about that to recruit for those rural and remote areas?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Well, I have heard RCMP representatives at round tables say that they are focusing on recruitment, but there are challenges both in recruiting into the force in general and then into rural detachments specifically. This is why I think your committee's undertaking this study is a perfect opportunity to get a more in-depth handle on what is happening in terms of RCMP recruitment, retention, and distribution in rural communities.

There is an added factor that is not just about boots on the ground in terms of serving officers, but also about a shortage in support staff and administrative staff. That's one of the issues that's been raised in Lakeland and when I travelled around in various communities. There are local municipalities and counties that are trying to address this issue themselves by coming to the table with funding offers to try to support hiring more administrative staff into the detachments to provide support that way. However, even as of last month I was hearing that there is still a long time frame in which that can actually be implemented to increase support staff in the detachments to—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Just as you were talking, the Library of Parliament gave us a report from 2014 regarding the previous motion that came here. It was about the economics of policing, which this committee studied in 2014.

One thing it talked about was the average cost to the RCMP of an RCMP member in the north being $220,000, whereas in the south it was $121,000. It's costing the service more as well to put people in there. Trying to get those incentives makes it even more expensive to get people to serve in rural and remote communities.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes. I suspect your committee may end up hearing concerns from some municipalities about the funding model for RCMP support in their local communities.

Speaking from the perspective of Alberta—I think Saskatchewan's is similar—the funding model is such that municipalities with more than 5,000 residents incur the complete cost of their own RCMP support. Now, those models are provincially developed, obviously, but because of the multiple jurisdictions involved in this question, I think you may hear such feedback through your committee.

● (1220)

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think I only have about 30 seconds left, haven't I?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'll just end by thanking you again. It's an issue that's really important for us to look at, and it's not something that would necessarily come up unless an individual member of Parliament championed it. Thank you for doing so.

The Chair: Mr. Motz, you may take seven minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Shannon, for being here today and for taking the leadership on this file, joining with our other Alberta colleagues in bringing the Alberta rural crime task force forward. It's very timely that we're doing this, because we have an issue.

You indicated in your presentation that a majority of crimes that have been committed and are being committed are property related: break and enters, thefts, vandalism, and things like those.

Do you have any idea why there seems to be an uptick in the violent rural crime trend and what this committee should be doing to undertake a study in that regard?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I think that getting an understanding of the root causes and the factors behind the increase in rural crime should be exactly a part of the objective of this committee in undertaking this assessment. I think it is true that there is at least a correlation between job losses and the economic downturn, which happens to be correlated with the increase in rural crime, but I myself would not make that claim or profess to know whether it's causation or correlation involved. I suspect you'll be able to find experts on the subject through the course of your assessment and gain clarity on this. That would be an ideal objective.

Mr. Glen Motz: As you have indicated, our colleagues around Alberta have had town hall meetings and round tables throughout Alberta with community groups, rural crime watches, RCMP detachments, etc. One thing being reported is that crimes in closer proximity to larger centres—Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Calgary—seem to be a big issue. Places within 100 kilometres around these were experiencing a lot of rural crime.

Is there an indication as to why this is happening? You touched on it briefly in your presentation. Can you expand on it briefly for us?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I heard the same thing when I was in round tables in Saskatchewan from colleagues there, that in those doughnut areas right around the big populated centres, crime is increasing most significantly. I myself do not know what the specific driver is behind those increases, except to say that I certainly hear it from RCMP members and from community members. There is an increasing awareness, I think, of the challenges for RCMP and law enforcement in suburban and in more rural and remote areas such as the area I represent.

It has been suggested that part of the cause is that they know there are vulnerable farms and businesses there, with challenges for law enforcement to respond in a timely way. There have been suggestions that this partly explains the increase.

Mr. Glen Motz: Just to expand on that to end that statement, you'll find even from speaking to those who have been caught, the suggestion is that they have a drug problem, generally. They're going out to look for property and they know there is less of an opportunity to be apprehended because of the lack of police presence and even less population, and no one can identify who they are, and they can't get a vehicle description, etc. That certainly is an issue.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, that's right, Glen, and the increases in organized crime and gang activities in those rural communities is also happening in indigenous communities in those rural areas.

● (1225)

Mr. Glen Motz: Right.

You talked briefly in your opening statement about the impact it has on your constituents. Anybody who has been a victim of a crime has some sense of violation.

Can you expand on some of the experiences that have been shared with you that are maybe unique to the vulnerabilities that the rural communities face when they know they are on their own, that the closest law enforcement, or any help, period, is their neighbour, and only if they can get hold of them? Law enforcement could be hours away.

Can you describe what impact that has on those constituents?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes. It's interesting you'd say that because when people started contacting me by email and on Facebook about this motion, it was disproportionately women. They are farm wives or wives of husbands who still work in oil and gas, so maybe theirs husbands are gone from the home for long hours or weeks at a time. The women very much feel like they are targets. They know there are long response times from RCMP, and many of them just say that they feel vulnerable all the time. They believe it's inevitable that theirs homes will be broken into or robbed. They find themselves contemplating all of their options and have no idea what they would do if they were confronted with that scenario.

I've been told by families that they are planning on moving away from rural communities that they chose to go to for safety in the first place. It's a real thing that businesses are leaving small towns and shutting down, businesses that have been in those towns for generations. Long-time family-owned small businesses are shutting down because of the repeated thefts.

Mr. Glen Motz: You indicated that there is some inequity in the funding model, and certainly in some of the western provinces with the RCMP, and how municipal police forces are responsible for covering the entire cost of their own policing.

You also indicated that in some of these rural detachments there might be trouble recruiting. In the round tables, have you heard suggestions from the RCMP and other members that they're fully staffed, but they're fully staffed on paper and they have people who are on administrative leave?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes.

Mr. Glen Motz: They have people who are on sick leave, or they're seconded to other parts of the province or the country. Those positions sit vacant, and it's not because they can't recruit for the positions; they just don't have the bodies and they have redeployed them elsewhere.

I know that in my area there are a lot of detachments where one guy is working and he has to cover hundreds of square kilometres in a shift to deal with calls. The vulnerability is there, and our criminals know it.

How do we deal with that?

The Chair: Mr. Motz's time is well over his allocation, and it's an important question, but you'll have to work your answer into some other response, possibly even to Mr. Dubé's question.

Mr. Dubé, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thanks for all the efforts you've made, Shannon, for being here today and also for accepting Christine's amendment. I think that was very gracious of you and I appreciate your agreeing that it brings more to an already important motion.

I don't know if I'm touching on exactly the same things, but I do want to talk about the resource issue for the RCMP. I just wonder if, in that context, you have any comparative figures or statistics, or even anecdotes, about the comparison with Ontario and Quebec where there are provincial police who are covering these far, remote, and rural areas versus other provinces where the RCMP is in charge.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: We tried to get some numbers for comparative analysis, which proved to be difficult. I hope that's something your committee will be able to clarify.

I have heard from municipal association representatives that they are concerned that the committee differentiate in their analysis between those communities that are only served by the RCMP and those in provinces that have a combination of law enforcement resources. They say you will see a significant gap in coverage.

Another interesting point that I heard from a stakeholder, just as you all take on this analysis, is to be clear about the parameters of what you consider to be rural. I think the definition currently is 100,000 and lower. Of course, the biggest populated area in my riding, for example, is the Alberta side of Lloydminster, which is 15,000. It's not really related to your question, but just—

● (1230)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: The higher the numbers are, the more likely it is there is a municipal police force—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: —which changes the issue as well. Fair enough.

That's an interesting issue.

We were talking about folks being on leave, unavailable, or reassigned. Over the last number of years we have heard about morale issues in the RCMP, leading to recruitment challenges. Is there any indication that's part of the issue as well, the fact that people aren't signing up to the RCMP in the same way they did a number of years ago?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, I have heard consistently from stakeholders at round tables who echo the same things you have all read publicly, the high levels of fatigue, burnout, and frustration.

What I hear from residents is that once they were very frustrated with the lag in, and in some cases non-existent, response time. That should not be misconstrued as a negative feeling towards the RCMP. In fact, those exact same residents will say they want more police presence, more visibility. It's a core priority for those residents, for the RCMP, to have sufficient resources to adequately serve and protect their communities. The RCMP members themselves expressed frustrations.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Arguably, I should know the answer to this. I've heard conflicting information, but even when it comes to dispatch and the availability of 911, for example.... I know cellphone towers and things like that are a big debate in this country, particularly in remote areas and rural communities. I might be mistaken, but I thought that 911 calls are supposed to work even when you basically have no coverage. I'm wondering how dispatching, and the ability to communicate play into dealing with some of the more urgent situations—not to downplay any forms of crime—that require first responders on the scene.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I hope that's an issue you can gain clarity on and get more information on from people involved in dispatching and law enforcement through the course of this assessment.

Without a doubt, I've heard directly from RCMP members that the lack of Wi-Fi and cell coverage is a serious concern for dispatching, their communications with each other, and also communication between residents and law enforcement.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I appreciate your mentioning Georgina. I think she has a lot of great things to say. I imagine your Conservative colleagues could help you with this.

Obviously, given that you presented the motion, you've done a lot of work, working with different stakeholders. Are you comfortable with providing the committee with a list of folks who you think are worthwhile hearing from on these issues?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, I would be more than happy to do that, absolutely.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Fantastic.

My last question has been answered a little with regard to some of the economic downturn. Is there anything else that you're seeing in terms of factors that might be explaining, in particular, the increase in property crime and things like that?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Glen touched on this earlier. I do think this issue around increased organized crime and gang activity in rural communities is an important factor for your committee to assess from the perspective of addicts who are committing repeated crimes, but also from the perspective of increased dealing and trading.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: If I could just jump in really quickly—sorry to cut you off but I think my time is just about done—we tend to think of remote communities as being up north, but there's also proximity to the border as well. Is this something that has come up in the context of talking about organized crime and things like that, or even human trafficking, like Pam brought up?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, it has, in initial research. I think there is probably an issue that you can investigate related to cross-border trafficking and dealing, yes.

● (1235)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Proximity to the border, great, thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much for undertaking this. I think there has been a debate in some circles about what the primary role of a state should be. I think that those who have made the case that the state's fundamental responsibility is to ensure the security and safety of citizens have it on the mark. This is a study that would obviously delve into that.

I want to ask you about numbers, though, because evidence has to really be the foundation of what we do here, in terms of public policy, but also this study.

You talked about the increase in the crime rate from 2015 to 2016, the year for which Statistics Canada has the most recent data available. Could you go over that?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Statistics Canada said that 2015 was the first year in 12 years that there was an increase in police-reported crime across Canada. Their analysis showed that the most widespread increases were, as a region, in western Canada. That was led by a 10% increase in rural Alberta, and the majority of those crimes were property crimes: thefts, vandalism, and robberies.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: In fact, from 2006 to 2016, there was a deep decrease across Canada of 28% in the crime rate, and from 1991 to 2016 there was a 50% decrease in the crime rate.

This does not take away from the substance of what you're doing. Obviously you've done a lot of work with stakeholders, and there have been plenty of reports looking at the worries and concerns that exist in rural Canada, particularly in the west, on these issues, but the numbers are where they are.

Have you looked at, either in your stakeholder engagement or any of your own analysis, the crime severity index that is held by Statistics Canada?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes. It is the crime severity index that also increased, and I think I addressed that in my opening comments, and—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The crime severity index basically measures the volume of crime and the relative seriousness of crime, let's say homicide compared to petty theft, like bicycle theft. In fact, criminologists have made the case, and others who study crime outside of the academic realm have made the case, that this a measure that should be taken perhaps even more seriously than the crime rate, which measures all crime, whether it's, to use that example again, bicycle theft versus homicide.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: As far as the crime severity index goes, in Alberta between 2006 and 2016 there was a 12% decrease in crime severity. From 2006 to 2016, in Manitoba, there was a 27% decrease in crime severity, and in Saskatchewan there was a 13% decrease. Now you might say that this has something to do with this index just looking at rates in cities in those provinces, but the *Western Producer* magazine said, "rural crime rates (per 100,000 people) are roughly constant". However, it does acknowledge that property theft is up.

When you're telling the committee that we should look at these issues, are you recommending that we look at instances like property crime that appear to be on the increase? The other crimes, particularly the severe crimes, are on the decrease; there's no question about that.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, I think it is clear that it is primarily property crimes, such as, robberies, vandalism, and thefts, that are the majority of increases—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Yes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: —but there has been increasing violence related to those.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Violence has taken place, there's no question.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, armed robbery.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm talking about measures on the whole, statistics on the whole, over long durations of time.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, I think getting clarity on all of these issues is exactly why the committee should do this.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You're talking motor vehicle thefts, thefts of under $5,000, breaking and entering, that type of thing. I just wanted clarity on that.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, and, Peter, I just wanted to mention in terms of current numbers, because you're right, some of them are sort of back....

According to *Maclean's* 2018 list of Canada's most dangerous places, seven of the top 10 places with the highest violent crime rates are in rural areas with populations of 25,000 or less. I just wanted to mention that. It also links to what I said in response to Matt. As your committee moves forward with the analysis, just be mindful of the population density and distribution over geography that you're assessing.

● (1240)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I look forward to delving into those details. I'm just going on what Statistics Canada has collected in terms of raw data.

I wonder to what extent matters of personal responsibility are also at play here. Again, I'll quote from the *Western Producer* magazine. It says on this specific issue:

> Security, not confrontation, is the best response. Driveway alert systems, cameras, motion detector lights, even sirens are viable measures. Some can be adopted for grain bins and shop doors. Systems can be linked to smartphones for live viewing.

Yes, it focuses on personal responsibility, but also, with the advances in technology that we're seeing, as far as rural folks are concerned, how much of a help can this be? I mean this in terms of dealing with things like petty thefts, property thefts, and the like, and making sure that we look at these issues in our study too.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I think that's important, and I would say that rural Canadians are well known for their self-sufficiency and taking initiative. I have countless constituents who have invested thousands of dollars—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Oh, I have no doubt that—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: —in exactly those kinds of measures, attempting to protect themselves, and who continue to face repeated break-ins and robberies and threats to their families—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: My question is more along—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: —and to their homes. Now it is at a point where they are on the verge of being refused personal and business insurance because of their experiences. Without a doubt I think rural Canadians would be the first to say that they take personal responsibility for themselves and their communities—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have maybe 15 or 20 seconds, so if I could just sum up by saying I have—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: —but they're spending thousands of dollars to do that themselves.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: —no doubt that the technology is there and that it can be used and is being used. I just wanted to know your thoughts on how it can be best employed to deal with it.

One last thing—and you don't have to answer this—is that I'm interested in the committee looking at this whole question of the inherent difficulties in rural policing simply because of geography and the rural and remote nature of so many of these communities, and what that means for policing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Liepert, you have five minutes. Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that one of the Liberal members of Parliament is publicly on record as having a contract with a construction company, and after that line of questioning, I wonder if the member is on retainer with the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association. That's unbelievable.

After listening to that line of questioning, Mr. Chair, I suggest this committee should take a trip to Alberta and Saskatchewan. I don't represent a rural riding, but there isn't a day that goes by when we don't hear about this issue, and to trot out those kinds of statistics....I don't know where that comes from, but it sure doesn't come from the ground if you have your feet on the ground in Alberta or Saskatchewan, I'll tell you, sir.

Anyway, why don't you answer Mr. Motz's question that you didn't get a chance to answer?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Oh, shoot. Remind me what it was.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I've had these discussions with the forces, as well. It's not that they can't recruit or that they have a shortage of people; it's the fact that many RCMP officers are—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, right.

Mr. Ron Liepert: —off on stress leave.... The other thing that's a factor with the RCMP today, I'm told, is that there's an increasing number of RCMP officers who are women on maternity leave, which is a natural thing to happen. Therefore, you have all these vacancies, but you can't go to a temp agency to replace them. It's not necessarily just the shortage, but rather the fact that these are positions that are temporarily vacant.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, I would just affirm that I've heard exactly the same things from RCMP representatives, certainly in Saskatchewan, with many senior members who were there when I travelled to three different town halls. They raised that issue. They indicated that's been—and Glen would probably know personally—a bit of a long-term challenge. My view is that's exactly the kind of issue your committee should look at. It's, I think, a federal responsibility to assess whether or not the issue is resourcing to the RCMP and finding out from the RCMP what needs to be done to address these issues of lack of boots on the ground and—

● (1245)

Mr. Ron Liepert: There is one other thing I would like to throw out there. Mr. Dubé mentioned police forces. When you get outside the four or five major centres in Alberta, there are no municipal police forces. Camrose is an anomaly: a smaller centre with a municipal police force.

Have you done any research on whether the existence of a provincial police force such as Ontario and Quebec have, which may or may not be more able to staff these regions...? Is there a correlation between rural crime in those provinces and that in Saskatchewan and Alberta, which do not have provincial police forces?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: That would be a very interesting subject for your committee to get into. As Albertans, we know that conversation comes up in a cyclical way every few years.

It would be very interesting to identify the gaps or differences between places where there is a provincial police force and also the RCMP and the applicability of that model to various provinces, which ultimately should be decided by provincial governments and their citizens.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I have a minute and a half, and I'm going to ask a question that I think can be done in a minute. My colleague would like the last half minute.

It has been a common belief and may have been proven that many of these crimes are tied to drugs, alcohol, and so on. Do you have thoughts on whether the ability to grow marijuana in your own home after July 1, or whenever it's going to be, is going to have a further negative impact?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I certainly hear lots of concerns, both from municipalities that are still grappling with their roles and responsibilities in terms of bylaw development and how they deal with that issue and from indigenous communities, which have raised serious concerns about that issue and its impact on rural crime in general.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair: You're down to 20 seconds.

Mr. Ron Liepert: That's all he needs.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

Chair, I'd like to give notice of a motion:

> That, the Committee invite the Minister of Public Safety to appear before it, no later than Thursday, June 21, 2018, to provide an explanation of the discrepancies found in the list of individuals he claims to have consulted on Bill C-71.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Spengemann, you have five minutes.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Ms. Stubbs, thanks you for bringing forward the motion, and thank you for being with us. It's evident that you're representing your constituents in a very genuine and capable manner by bringing this motion forward. I think it's very important for this committee to hear the rural voice and to have a balanced view. Canada is an incredibly large country—the second largest land mass—and so much of our geography is rural.

In contrast to Mr. Fragiskatos, who put some statistics to you, I want to go a bit more into the qualitative side so that you can give the committee more of an appreciation of what it's like to be the victim of the kinds of crimes you're describing. We had a range of them. You've described gang-related crimes, and there was some discussion on violent crimes. There was also property crime, and we can probably distinguish petty property theft from theft of larger items and organized crime rings focusing on property theft.

What are you hearing from your constituents with respect to how these crimes impact them? Which ones have the most psychological and economic impact on the community you're serving and representing?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: The impact is twofold; it is both financial cost and emotional cost. In the case of taking personal responsibility, many rural residents have equipped themselves with security systems in their shops and homes and they are striking up citizens on patrol—regular watches during which they get into their pickup trucks and drive around the area. They report suspicious vehicles to each other, and if there is an offender on the property, a neighbour will call a neighbour, who will then call another neighbour. That neighbour will call the police, but the first neighbour called will go to the farm to either scare the people off the property or to assist, if required. That is what is actually happening out there.

Not only are there costs in loss of equipment and vehicles and for security systems, but obviously there are safety concerns and feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, fear.

● (1250)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Right.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: There are husbands who are worried every time they leave the property and leave their families behind. Women who frankly, like me on occasion now.... I live on a farm on a highway, and every home has been broken into up and down the highway. While my husband is snoring like a log, I randomly find myself pacing around at 4:30 a.m., in our sunroom, scanning the ditches and the highway when the dogs are barking, because we're the last one on the highway; we're vulnerable. That's the feeling that people have.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: The type of property crime that's of most common concern—and there's a range—is whether it is organized. Is it car theft rings, truck theft rings, theft rings that are looking at farm equipment, or is it something more petty than that—people breaking in and stealing a TV, stealing some cash, stealing some jewellery?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: It seems to be a combination of both. One thing I hear a lot of frustration about from both law enforcement and community members is repeated offences. There's a "slap on the wrist" response, and then in no time at all they are back out doing the exact same things. Often they are known either to community members or to law enforcement.

I didn't want to add that part into the motion, but I suspect that through the course of your assessment, you will hear some concerns around wanting tougher sentencing and stopping that revolving door.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I didn't want to lose the opportunity to have you here and not ask you about gender dimensions. Are you concerned about intimate partner gender-based violence in rural Canada, and if so, what manifestation is that concern taking through people you're in touch with?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I personally do not know the statistics or whether there is a verified distinction between domestic violence in rural as compared with urban communities. I suspect it's an issue that crosses socio-economic classes, geography, and demographics, but when I was discussing the proposal of the NDP amendment, they did raise this as an issue.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Is it worth the committee's time to look at it as a function of the downturn that you described in economic opportunity, perhaps, in parts of western Canada, which potentially increases or elevates intimate partner violence?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I wouldn't want to limit the topics you discuss, although I would say on behalf of my constituents that really emphasizing the assessment of front-line law enforcement in rural communities is the number one thing.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thanks very much.

I think that's my time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Stubbs, some of my colleagues asked questions to understand crimes like this that are currently being committed in rural areas.

As you mentioned earlier, some thugs or young hooligans are already known to people in the community. What I would like to know is whether there is a self-defence problem. People on farms or in rural areas are all armed, or at least most of them are, because they need their weapons to kill the bears or wolves that prowl about. I would like to know if they tend to defend themselves because there's a problem with police intervention.

● (1255)

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes. I did not include that aspect in the text of my motion, because I very much wanted to be able to achieve cross-partisan support so that your committee could undertake this work. I suspect, though, that as you go through this assessment you will hear from people the same thing I hear, which is a concern or a feeling, when people are forced into the position because of long response times, that they have no other option than to protect themselves and their families and their property, and a concern that after people do so, they don't want to be revictimized for having had to do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Have some individuals who have had to defend themselves to protect their families or their property been accused of doing so?

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes, there is a case happening in Alberta right now, and there have been others that we all know about in recent months. Then, there are lots of stories that I hear from people in Lakeland, including that of a very elderly farmer—you know the farmers who keep saying they'll retire but who just can't quit. Recently, in one of the communities in Lakeland there was a guy who broke onto the farm of a very elderly man and the guy ended up holding him to the ground with a gun to his head. The guy eventually was scared off by neighbours who came over.

People ask what options they have, other than to try to protect themselves and their families, in those situations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: In other words, in rural regions, in Alberta as elsewhere in Canada, people feel that they aren't safe and that they have to take responsibility for their own protection. This is a problem we must also take into account in our evaluation.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes. There's a young guy who runs the Facebook group Farmers Against Rural Crime who said something at a meeting last month that really struck me. He said locks only keep honest people out.

They have concerns, particularly around discussions of firearm ownership for law-abiding rural Canadians and the way they use them in their daily lives, but also in terms of feeling vulnerable in their homes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: My colleague asked you if land management was different when the provincial police forces were present, for example the Ontario Provincial Police or the Sûreté du Québec.

To your knowledge, do Ontario and Quebec have the same problems as Alberta and Saskatchewan, or is it totally different?

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I think this is an issue that your committee should undertake. I suspect you'll find that those rural communities that only are served by RCMP officers, who are stretched thin across those geographical regions and then certainly, as is the case in Lakeland, have often dual responsibilities, serving indigenous communities in the region as well.... I suspect you'll find a real difference between those that have provincial police—

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: My question is very political: do you think that the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan should think about having a provincial police service like the ones in Quebec and Ontario to ensure their own safety without depending on the RCMP? Given the evolution of society, should we discuss these things?

[*English*]

The Chair: Please respond in 25 words or less.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I think that's a decision which provincial residents and provincial government should make. I have to say that, while I think there's a valid discussion around that issue, there is also, at the same time, a deep and abiding love for the RCMP in rural communities across all those provinces because of the RCMP's long-term presence and responsibility for the communities that they have been members of for a long time.

The Chair: That was a little bit more than 25 words.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Sorry.

The Chair: Ms. Dabrusin was next up, and we did lose a little bit of time.

If you wish to ask a question for a couple of minutes, I'm happy to arbitrarily extend the time.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: It's the last two minutes; I was inclined to let people go.

You can, if you want to, give us suggestions afterwards. I know that somebody asked you about additional witnesses.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Yes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: We have focused on policing in a lot of the discussion today, but in fact, your motion covers a lot more than that, including resources for judicial and rehabilitation systems, and improved support for victims.

If you have suggestions about these things that you would like to submit to us, I would appreciate that as well.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Okay, great. I'd be happy to do that.

Thank you.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Thank you, Ms. Stubbs.

This brings our meeting to a close.

Colleagues, with regard to next Thursday, I'm proposing that we deal with the study on indigenous people in the correctional system. Hopefully the ion scanner study will be out of translation by then, so if we have time, we can deal with that.

Ms. Damoff and Ms. Dabrusin also have motions that I think are time sensitive.

Those are four items. I'm sure you'll have other suggestions as to what to deal with on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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